

THE TITLE *TANTRĀKHYĀYIKA* AS OPPOSED  
TO THE TITLE *PAÑCATANTRA*

An interesting question which comes up in the study of the *Pañcatantra* complex concerns the title of the original version of the work. Almost as differing as the attempts to prove one or another title as the original one are the interpretations of the meaning of the word *tantra* which appears as part of the title in the earliest recensions preserved.

I would first like to sum up in a few sentences the standpoints of the leading scholars who dealt with this query and then offer a somewhat newly dimensioned attitude to the matter concerned.

Most scholars agree that the original title of the work was one of the two preserved in the earliest recensions. Which of these two, they disagree on. In Hertel's<sup>1</sup> opinion it was the title *Tantrākhyāyika*. Edgerton<sup>2</sup> is certain that it was *Pañcatantra* and Keith<sup>3</sup> is inclined to agree with Edgerton. Reconstructing the original title of the work Artola<sup>4</sup> puts the titles mentioned together.

The interpretation of the meaning of the title depends on the interpretation of the meaning of the most intriguing word appearing in both of them — the word *tantra*. Different explanations of its meaning have been given by different scholars. While in his final explanation Hertel<sup>5</sup> comes to the conclusion that *tantra* means «Klugheitsfall» and *Tantrākhyāyika* «aus Erzählung von Klugheitsfällen bestehendes /Lehrbuch/», Edgerton<sup>6</sup> translates the *tantra* as «book» and *Pañcatantra* as «the five books». Although doubtful as to what the title *Pañcatantra* originally meant, Keith<sup>7</sup> suggests as the most probable the meaning

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1. *Tantrākhyāyika*, die älteste Fassung des *Pañcatantra*. 1. Teil, Leipzig und Berlin, 1909, p. 7.

2. *The Panchatantra Reconstructed*, Vol. 2, New Haven, 1924, p. 181.

3. *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, London, 1961, p. 247.

4. WZKM, 52, 1953, pp. 380 ff.

5. WZKM, 20, 1906, pp. 81 ff.

6. *The Panchatantra*, London, 1965, p. 10.

7. I.c.

« five subject-matters ». Studying the semantic development of the meaning of the word *tantra* Artola<sup>8</sup> comes to the meaning « main point », « chief matter » and selects that one. He then reconstructs the title of the original work as *Nīti-pañcatantrākhyāyika* and translates it as « the little narrative-book based on (or illustrating) the five main points of *nīti* ». Geib<sup>9</sup> is in complete agreement with Artola's interpretation of the title. He only determines the content of the five main points of *nīti* in accordance with his own interpretation of the work without claiming that the title *Tantrākhyāyika* was also the original title of the work.

Both Artola and Geib in their translation ignore the fact that the *tantrākhyāyika* can not be interpreted as an independent word. The last member of the compound is the word *ākhyāyikā* (f.) which changes its gender in the compound. This makes us interpret the whole compound as an attribute, the same as Hertel did, presumably the attribute attached to the word *śāstra*. In the *kathāmukha* the work is twice described as a special art of *śāstra*<sup>10</sup> written in *tantras*. It differs from the *śāstra* in that it is a *sumanoharaṃ śāstram*, a *śāstra* which delights or captivates the heart deeply, that is to say a *śāstra* which is a literary work. This interpretation is testified also by the title *Tantrākhyāyika* which as an attribute to *śāstra* and means a *śāstra* that is a short literary prose work<sup>11</sup> in *tantras* or on *tantra*.

As Artola-Geib's and Hertel's interpretations of the meaning of the word *tantra* fit better into the *kāvya* nature of the work designating the core of it, they are, it seems, more acceptable than the others. On the other hand Artola-Geib's interpretation serves this purpose better than Hertel's. First, it maintains a clear connexion with the original meaning of the word *tantra* and second, it determines more completely the nature of the work it designates. The work is a sort of literary

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8. l.c.

9. *Zur Frage nach der Urfassung des Pañcatantra*, Wiesbaden, 1969, pp. 18 ff.

10. *Sakalārthasāstrasāraṃ jagati samālokya viṣṇuśarmāpi tantrairi pañcabhīretaiścakāra sumanoharaṃ śāstram / kathāmukha*, 3 /

Having examined the core of all *arthasāstras* in the world Viṣṇuśarma also composed a heart-captivating *śāstra* in these five *tantras*.

*Tenāpi ca sūpāyamālocya śāstrāṇi likhitāni pañca tantrāṇi / by the end of kathāmukha /*

And he (Viṣṇuśarma) having considered a good mode wrote five *tantras* as *śāstras*.

11. Artola believes *ākhyāyika* to be a diminutive form in the sense of denoting the popularity of the work and the affection with which it was accepted by the public. The word occurs in the recension which is not only a simple *kathā* meant to entertain and teach political and practical wisdom in a light way. This recension was not so widely spread and popular as the others, so it would be wrong to consider it as being so much fondled by the readers as that they should start using diminutive forms for it. *Ākhyāyikā* is a technical term which denotes a short narrative work. Compared with the other narrative works known in Sanskrit literature *Tantrākhyāyika* is really a short one.

version of *nītiśāstra*, only the teaching of *nīti* in it is not exposed in a systematic and detailed way. It is concerned only with the core of the *nīti*, which the author of the work finds in the necessity of being able to distinguish the true state of a case from an apparent one. For that reason the translation of *tantra* as «the main point», «chief matter»<sup>12</sup> seems to be the most appropriate one.

If we now take into consideration the title *Tantrākhyāyika* in the light of the kind of literature it belongs to, we may find ourselves facing a new possibility of the interpretation of the title. The work belongs to *kāvya* literature. One of very common poetical ornaments employed in *kāvya* literature is *śleṣa*. Should it then be strange for the author of the work, a master of *kāvya* style, who somehow builds up the composition of the work on double meanings<sup>13</sup>, to put a double meaning in the form of *śleṣa* into the very title of his work? Treated as a *śleṣa*, *Tantrākhyāyika*, the title of the earliest recension preserved, unfolds before us the mastership of its author who in one compound determines the work by its content on the one hand, and by its form on the other hand. If understood in this way, the translation of the title *Tantrākhyāyika* is as follows:

- (a) / *śāstra* / which is a short literary prose work on the main point / of *nīti* /
- (b) / *śāstra* / which is a short literary prose work / written / in chapters.

As the title *Tantrākhyāyika* belongs to the earliest recension preserved, which is at the same time the best representative of the original work<sup>14</sup>, we may assume that it belonged to the original work as well. Besides that this title designates the work much better and more completely. When we interpret it as a *śleṣa* it reveals one of the principle characteristics of the work — double meaning. At the very first encounter with the work this double meaning makes us probe into the

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12. Artola (l.c.) finds the five main points of *nīti* in the themes of the five chapters. Geib (l.c.) tries to find them in the aspects of the relation — friend versus enemy — as treated in the book. In this attempt he does not succeed in achieving five distinctive aspects of this relation. And that should be expected if they really were the five main points of a serious scholarly discipline such as *nīti*. On the other hand Geib's insisting on the five main points does not fit into his interpretation at all. In his opinion the work teaches the core of *nīti* and that is then the chief matter or the main point. It seems that Geib was led in this attitude by the need of joining the two titles available into one.

13. See GEIB, l.c., chapter «Interpretation».

14. GEIB (l.c.) has definitely proved that *Tantrākhyāyika* gives a fuller and better picture of the original work than Edgerton's reconstructed text. With Edgerton even *Pañcatantra* in its original form remains just a celebrated collection of fables and stories. But if the text was, just a collection of fables and stories it would be a bad one. A bad collection in the sense that there were too few stories and too many stanzas in it.

matter: examine, estimate and discover things. And this process which is the essential part of the whole composition, was most probably meant to be a challenge for us by the author.

If we accept the title *Tantrākhyāyika* as the original one we should be able to explain about the origin of the title *Pañcatantra*. The authors of later recensions did not fully comprehend all the shades of meaning and the puns that the work abounds in. That such was the case can be seen in the way they shortened or enlarged the work turning a refined composition with great *kāvya* qualities into popular reading. Such people could easily fail to see the *śleṣa* nature of the title. In the *kathāmukha* they found the word *tantra* mentioned as a formal category. At the end of each and every book they read that it was the end of a *tantra*, that is to say the end of a chapter or a book. Taking only this meaning of *tantra* into account, the meaning available in the text itself, they read it into the meaning of the title as well. So they changed gradually a long and rather complicated name *Tantrākhyāyika* into a simpler and more easy to understand *Pañcatantra*. Should the case be vice versa one would expect at least somewhere the appearance of the title *Pañcatantrākhyāyika*.

The work is generally known and treated under the name of *Pañcatantra*. Among the texts preserved two groups should be distinguished, one represented by the texts which can be called the masterpieces of *kāvya* literature, and the other represented by the texts that are interesting collections of popular witty stories rather loosely connected. As we have to deal here with two different levels according to their aesthetic achievements and literary values I would be inclined to treat the older level belonging to high *kāvya* achievements under the title of *Tantrākhyāyika* and the other one under the title of *Pañcatantra*.